

SPIRALING MATRIX

Excavations of feminine memories

An interdisciplinary exhibition by Giti Thadani





The spiraling matrix – Excavations of feminine memories

**DOCUMENTATION, CONSERVATION &
DISSEMINATION OF WOMEN'S TRADITIONS:**

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The goddess :

meditate on my holistic form of the one

*I am the formless,
thus the form of everything,
everything emerges from me*

*from the two yonis flow out
the milliards of cells of ether & tamas energy.*

*The opening of the yonic-eye
the flowing out of its potential
is the form of creation & desire that I enact*

the revelation the form of knowledge.



*The temple in Ali Rajpur is unique,
built from 7 different kinds of stone.
The citation found in the temple
certifies that it had been built by a
queen and was only meant for
women.*

For the past 25 years, Ms. Giti Thadani has been documenting and collecting information on women's symbolical languages & traditions through iconography, texts, architecture and oral history.

The long term objective of this effort is the dissemination of this material to lobby for the preservation and protection for most of the sites; some of which are perhaps the only surviving examples of their kind globally.

This work is important in that it is the first work of its kind that looks at archaeology, temple sites, iconographies etc from a feminist perspective and seeks to initiate a campaign to preserve important sites. In the process of working with a feminist perspective a number of deserted sites and women's traditions have been discovered. The majority of these are in disarray, unprotected or manipulated to suit the needs of current vested interest. The purpose of the exhibition is also to provide a socio-historical context to the feminist movement in India. Women are made into the repository of tradition but with no access to their own tradition. Even the earlier spaces that were seen as women's spaces are being displaced.

In India feminist scholarship is often restricted in its methodology, in the disciplines being studied. Further it is restricted to academic institutions. Disciplines like Indology, art history are conceived very traditionally and work only with what is known.

The exhibition and workshop has been developed through a process of many years of working with texts, travelling all over the country combining a scholastic and experiential approach. Some of the sites have been found from textual references, some through the process of travelling. "Gradually it becomes possible to connect the different geographies of the sites, the images, texts and women's own stories, rituals etc. to create an overall context. This overall context does not subsume the local histories but instead emerges from them," says Giti. Shakti has been associated with this project for years and has held workshops for women with Giti in Himachal.

- *Mirra Savara, Shakti*

Giti Thadani knows many languages - Sanskrit, Hindi, English, French, German, Hungarian & Italian. A few of her presentations:

- Feminine Cosmologies and architectural space in shakti temple sites Delhi School of Architecture 1988
- 'Mythic and Memoric Time, Max Mueller Bhavan, Bombay, 1989
- Politics and semantics of sexuality, Yale University, 1990
- Ecologies of desire, University of Verona, 1992/1993
- Sexual Constructions & safe sex outreach, AIDS Congress, Berlin, June 93
- Politics of desire & sexual constructions in Indian histories, NAZ Foundation, London, 1994
- Sanskrit language roots in feminine Cosmogonies, Women's Museum, Wiesbaden, 1996
- Cosmological subjectivities and the politics of civilizational history, Deshpandesh, Toronto, 1998

● some of her activities:

- Resource person for the Women's Program - SUTRA Himanchal Pradesh 87-91.
- Consultant for the Film KHEL (documentation of possession rituals in Uttar Pradesh), Dir. Saba Dewan & Rahul Roy, Doordashan, Indian National Television 1995
- Author of book *Sakhiani*, Cassell, England and the U.S 1996
- Author of book *Meibius Trip* 2003, Penguin & 2004 Spinifex, Australia
- Photographic Exhibition : Alkazi Foundation of Arts, Nov 2001, Shridharani Gallery, Triveni, New Delhi
- Current visual work : Series of silent video films/stills - Light

Disfiguring - Invisibilizing the feminine

महिलाओं को इस
द्वार के भीतर आना
सख्त मना है।

Women strictly
prohibited from entering
this door (temple).
Sign on devi temple
(Himanchal Pradesh)

The manipulation of older shaktic histories has severe historical socio-cultural implications as can be seen in this ban on the entry of women by the new practicing trust of a devi temple.

These trusts far from conserving these traditions have done a surgical operation. Sometimes, sculptures are taken out, polished and plastered over or masculinised.

The situation is no different in the disciplines of indology and art history. There is a sheer gender silence and ignorance propounded in the name of 'objective scholarship'. Implicit in this is the issue of what may be represented and what may not be. Central to this is the issue of gender cognition.

Whereas the temples under the Archaeological Survey of India by and large are preserved, yet some of the temples (particularly yogini have been manipulated). One example is the cementing of a male bhairav in the open centre of the yogini temple in Ranipur Jharial, Orissa, the yoginis are now seen as his servants.



The terrible rupture caused by the Islamic invasions resulting in the complete disfigurement of the above temple city of yoginipura Delhi, has left an indelible mark.

The present form may often be crass desecration. Some temples are deliberately not preserved, used as garbage dumps or squatted as below in Hampi where part of the site is immaculately preserved by A.S.I, yet some of the oldest devi temples are used as waste zones by the temple trust





The sculpture on the left was found in the open in a small village in Gujarat. Now it has been converted into a male god. A new temple has been constructed over it. This is the only existing documentation. The sculpture also represents an unconsorted Parvati holding Ganesh in one of her hands. It belongs too to the spectrum of the independent matrikas in which one of the matrikas is represented with an elephant head. Matangi (mata - angi. mother's limb), one of the words for elephant is a marker of a matriafocal genealogy.

Now both these representations have been erased from a certain collective consciousness, whereas Ganesh and a demur Parvati are glorified and found in the new calendar reductive kitsch.



Ascent to the sky



Shiva, she hundredfold, of the chain of the 3-1000 forms of tandav, the dance of the skies.

The urdhva tandav in its multiple forms is about fine balance, canalization opening and extension of the kundalini energy of the yoni ascent into the sky – ecstatic flight

It is a stiff dance contest the priests, indologists and anthropologists repeatedly narrate. The context reaches its climax, Shiv raises his right leg at a stiff angle beginning his dance of death – the urdhva tandav. A cloud of shame supposedly overcomes Kali. How can she raise her leg and open her yoni to the sky?





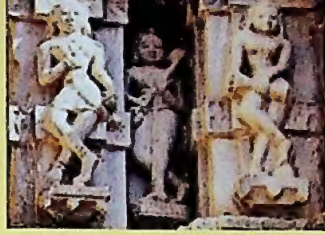
Moebius Trip

Giti Thadani. New Delhi, Penguin Books, 2003, 181 p., ISBN 014-302960-6.

"Giti Thadani has been driving her jeep around India for fifteen years. Blessed with a rare historical sensibility, including an eye for architectural detail, she ventures off-road in search of lost temples, sculptures and cosmological sites from Madhya Pradesh to Kanyakumari to Gujarat. One thought, one reflection leads to another as she contemplates the cultures and mythologies that produced these marvels, and the more recent cultures and mythologies that have left them to neglect and desecration. Her inner and outer journeys unfold each other.

"Along the way, she meets the people who make India what it is - an incense-wallah who dropped out of engineering college because he fell in love with scents, a young woman from an archaeological museum who helps Giti find a yogini temple, a passing driver who leaps out of his truck to change Giti's tyre when her hands get too cold to function. Giti's passion for architecture, sculpture, mythology, iconography and artistic heritage are infectious. A travelogue unlike any other, *Moebius Trip* is at once a road journal, a collection of musings and a cry for the respect and preservation of one of the world's oldest civilizations." www.vedamsbooks.com

"It was over fifteen years ago, whilst driving into the interiors that I chanced upon some old archaeological sites. What I encountered were sculptures and temples in often stunning natural locations that seemed not only to not fit into the calendar kitch of present Hinduism but also that of art history and iconography. Three headed devi figures, a nine headed Kali, an autonomous Parvati with three eyes carrying Ganesh, animal headed goddesses, an androgynous Kali figure with the serpent emerging, circular roofless temples with no centralised images, triangulated temple built from seven different kinds of stone, triangular rock and other kinds of organic formations pointed to very different feminine symbolologies, a far cry away from either the demur two eyed goddess-consort or the 'femme fatale'. The more I travelled the length and breadth of the country, the more complex the philosophies of these sites seemed to be. Yet certain principle, symbols, sculptures, myths seemed to repeat themselves both in the textual and temple traditions. Subsequently, I also made the other discovery of the contemporary destruction and manipulation of some of these sculptures and temples. Images that I had photographed a few years earlier suddenly seemed to have vanished; some lay hidden under a coat of distemper, while others were reduced to an orange heap. The sculptures that had preserved archetypal memories for over more than a millennium were consigned to the debris of amnesia. It was as if they had never existed except perhaps as part of a collection of photographs." - Giti



Aims of the Spiraling Matrix Project

In lieu of the deep lacuna relating to the lack of research, documentation, conservation, continuum and representation of these traditions, the project aims to:

1. enhance inter-disciplinary research, documentation and resource material
2. disseminate this through exhibitions, audio-visual lectures, workshops and seminars
3. create both local & international networks
4. be a platform that invites project partners to make interventions at various levels – be they socio-cultural, educational, artistic, archaeological etc.
5. create a new awareness on the complex issues of gender & sexuality

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